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Atari Online News, Etc.
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->From the Editor's Keyboard
"~~~~~"

"Saying it like it is!"

I have to say that I'm really ticked off...at myself, this week! Earlier in the week, there was something that I either saw on the news or read in the newspaper, or saw on the news that really had me ready to tee off on it for this week's issue. A couple of days later, I can't remember what it was! I guess the idea was a fast and fleeting one, because that's strange for me not to remember a topic. I might not remember what I had wanted to say about it, but it's rare that I'd forget what the story line was about! Maybe it will come back to me in a few days - who knows!

So, you're spared the written onslaught this week! But, that leaves me without any fresh ideas for my commentary. The Olympics are over, so that is old news (but congrats to the U.S. for all of their golds and other medals!). We're still in a snow-free zone here the past week. Perhaps the groundhog was right last month, and there's only a couple of more weeks of winter to deal with, finally. We'll see! So, let's move on to another week's issue, shall we!

Until next time...

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PEOPLE ARE TALKING
compiled by Joe Mirando
joe@atarinews.org

Hidi ho friends and neighbors. Believe it or not, I'm all talked out today. I'm not going to bore you with my take on politics or health care or global warming or the Olympics.

It's been a strange week weather-wise... Snow and above freezing temps, continuous rain with below freezing temps (but just barely), and even a little bit of sun here and there. One thing we know for sure is that spring is on its way. Finally the cold and snow and being shut indoors will dwindle down to nothing, and maybe we'll even wistfully think back on the first really hot spring day and wish for a little bit of that chill and a snowflake or two.

Naaaaaaah. [grin]

Let's just take a look at the STuff from the NewsGroup for a change. Okay?
Yeah, I thought you'd agree.

From the comp.sys.atari.st NewsGroup
=====

'Phantom' asks about adapting a battery to his NVRAM chip to provide the necessary power:

"Which pins on the NVRAM chip does one need to connect a external Battery to, in order to fix the weak or dead battery problem.

I've a Falcon here that I use for testing various modifications on. My NVRAM chips all seem to be the same type, which I think is known as Type A.

I need to know what the original voltage was of the battery in the NVRAM chip. And which pins that I can get a voltage reading from, and for trying a external battery modification."

Peter West tells Phantom:

"I don't know about your Falcon, but on my Falcon and that of several other Cheshunt Computer Club members, the battery had to be connected to wires in the chip itself, after carefully removing the top layer. and not to any of the pins. My chip was marked 48T87 C and Z143906. The battery is a single small lithium cell.

In the end I found it easier to replace the NVRAM chip - they cost only a few dollars. Fitted a socket at the same time so I can change it easier when this chip's battery expires in a few years time. This needed a hole cut out of the shielding above the chip (or omitting that part of the shielding). Keyboard fits over it OK."

Phantom replies:

"I have 2 Falcons apart down to the motherboards, One for experiments and the other one has a problem that I'm trying to fix.

Both have similar looking NVRAM chips, 2nd set of numbers are the same but top number is different and numbers on top left corner are different. I've took a snap pic of each, I'm going to try e-mailing them to you.

Pass them around to anyone, who knows something about these. Just don't post them anywhere without asking me please. I consider my snap pics, as part of my work.

Anyone who uses a Falcon or does work on chips like this and wants to see the pics, just e-mail me and I'll e-mail them to you."

'Dave' adds:

"All the NVRAM chips I have seen are basically a RAM chip with a large plastic cover and cell underneath. If you don't prise the plastic cover off the flat Cell (a battery should really have more than one cell) will drag the output of you good cell low. So I suggest that you prise the top off and remove the flat cell. You will then see what voltage the cell and what pins it needs to be connected to...."

Derryck Croker tells Dave and Phantom:

"All the NVRAM chips I have seen are basically a RAM chip with a large plastic cover and cell underneath. If you don't prise the plastic cover off the flat Cell (a battery should really have more than one cell) will drag the output of you good cell low. So I suggest that you prise the top off and remove the flat cell. You will then see what voltage the cell and what pins it needs to be connected to...."

Dave concludes:

"Yes, in that case adding an extra cell isn't any use...."

Guillaume Tello tells us that he...

"Just wanted to know how many ROMS are there in the TOS 3.06 for TT?
2 or 4??"

Phantom tells Guillaume:

"In a TT, I'm not sure, but I think 2."

Jim DeClercq corrects Phantom:

"Definitely 4. TOS 2.06, for STe, can be had in two chips."

Phantom replies:

"There are 4 TOS chips in a TT? hmmm.... Interesting...

I've never had a TT before, about the only atari system that I've not had at one time. I'd like to have a nice one.

My mistake about the number of ROMs, I thought there were 2, but I was just guessing as I've had no experience on that system, I know about the MSTe which is similar in some ways."

Now phantom asks about hacks for S-Video cables:

"I was wondering if anyone has made any type of adapters or cable hacks for a S Video Cable?

There are a few atari video related devices that can use a S Video Cable for input.

Any links, or info is appreciated."

'PP' tells Phantom:

"[The] Cable is smallest problem. Atari ST and followers have no S-Video output. So, you need some modding in machine:
<http://ppera.07x.net/atari/stvid.php>

Or get some RGB-S-Video converter . Basically, it is not too hard to make yourself one - with some PAL encoder chip..."

Phantom replies:

"Ok, I've seen that page before.

I need an S video Cable with 2 RCA type plugs on one end for (luma and chroma). They need to be male, but I have adapters if they are female. If someone has one of these or can make me one, e-mail me."

Ben Smith adds:

"A Video Cable is in the Works that Gives you S-Video Output for your ST! You can hookup your ST to a 32" Big Screen LCD Flat Panel TV for a Brilliant and Beautiful Picture! And I'm going to buy Two of them for my Mega ST's! I can't tell you who will be Selling it or Making it, but it's coming!..."

Phantom replies:

"Well that's good and all... I'm sure it will be useful.

I am looking for a S Video Cable with 2 ends that have chroma and luma for my Expose Digitiser. If someone can make me one, or has one. I will pay a reasonable price for it, or trade atari stuff if you want something from my atari collections. Also have PC games in original boxes with manuals. Many haven't been used.

Also, does anyone know if a 8 pin mini din port (Y) adapter exists? If so, e-mail me a link, address, etc where I can order.

I need to split a out put into 2 different inputs.

If not, I need a few of these made, should be able to make one out of cables."

Phantom now asks about the Centurbo II:

"Are there any CT2B users out there anywhere?

I was wondering if there have been any modifications, software or info for better performance or bug fixes if any have been found over the past 2years or so.

Also, of the Flashes, which version is the best to use? And are there any known problems with any of the Flashes? I'm a CT2B owner myself."

Mark Bedingfield tells Phantom:

"I have one. I use the latest flash (forget which one as it would be more than a couple of years old) it has the misfortune on my early CT2B of restricting it to 32meg. Its a trade off, latest flash or more ram and as 46 meg of ram appears to be enough for me, I'm not that worried.

I only have a stock Falcon setup atm tho, which remind's me I need to repair my screenblaster."

Phantom tells Mark:

"I didn't know that any of the Flashes had a effect of the size of FastRam!?

[I would] Like to know which one, and the side effect, crashes?"

Mark replies:

"Its not the flash that effects the ram size, its the chipset. Because it has an early chipset there are issues with its memory addressing. I wouldn't be worried about it if I were you.

As for stability, I've struggled to keep the CT2 stable, its VERY fussy about what it will and won't run. I'm not sure the reasoning behind that but suspect its more mainboard related. I have a TT and another 14 meg Falcon so I have plenty to experiment on."

Ekkehard Flessa adds:

"I've got a CT2A.

I don't know any [modifications] at all. Mine hasn't been updated since it was installed."

Phantom replies:

"Ok, I have 2 CT2Bs, and one is more stable than the other. Actually, it's almost as stable as a stock falcon. I can run just about anything on it.

They other one is not as stable. However, the software setup is different.

I need to change the main bootup manager to XBOOT III, which I have (original package) and do some sorting of Auto and ACCs. Some need to be removed as I've found that some are just about the same thing, just in another look. I'm surprised that it is as stable as it is, as I had that one loaded down with all kinds of ACCs, Auto programs and then the stuff related to the desktop. However, I had the best software I could get at that time. It needs the software streamlined and maybe a few heatsinks and a few wire connections checked.

But I have found the IDE upgrade on both to be rock solid and a lot faster than stock. Also, the video modification if done right, allows solid TC resolutions above 640x480. The software for that modification needs installed correctly too. I found that on one, it worked but wasn't setup correctly. And there are 2 or 3 versions and only one needs to be used.

Having programs installed that do the same thing but may have a few different features can cause problems on a CT2B imo. I've found that just about anything will work, but keeping it streamlined is part of the answer to a stable CT2B system. Also, the wire connections need to be secured. I've used a HotGlue Gun on some connections for stability and insulation.

I also have a almost stock Falcon setup and a couple of motherboards to tinker on.

You mentioned a different chipset. I know there was a Centurbo I or(A)version, that had the expansion ports.

If there were different chipsets on the B version, I'd like to know which ones, as I have 2, and there is a difference between the heatsink and Fan on the boards.

Also, anything about Dolmen you can tell me, or anyone?

For me the CT2B is just what I needed on my Falcon for extra speed over all. I think it was the right way to go, because compatibility is really good, at least on mine. But there are improvements that could be done.

The Blitter thing was/is annoying. I never fully understood why it had to be disabled, And it's one of the main causes for crashes.

However, when getting it all setup correctly, it's a real nice speedy way to fly. It's not the Fastest, but being able to use Apex and some other software with extra speed and memory is nice.

If anyone, knows of any modifications, software or hardware for better performance and stability of the Centurbo II version B, or earlier versions, then I'd be very interested to read or see them."

Rodolphe Czuba tells Phantom:

"Don't confuse CT2 A & CT2 B please...

Your CT2 is A, not B.

A = 32 MB max with early chip (from National Semiconductors).

B = 128 MB max with my designed chip (CPLD)

The letter is on the PCB after CT2..."

Mark adds:

"Mine is a CT2B Rudolph, with early flash it pulls up the full 64MB chip, later flash only 32mB is available. Still a good card tho."

Rodolphe replies:

"Not normal thing because ALL CT2 B have the same code and ship!
And the EDO ship is decoding and managing 128 MB.

What do you mean by 'flash'? The software inside flash ship or CPLD???"

"Sorry for the delay Rudolphe, I haven't used it a lot lately as the battery has given up in the dallas. Will have to sort it out as I'm rearranging my den.

Well folks, that's it for this time around. Tune in again next week, same time, same station, and be ready to listen to what they are saying when...

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White scored a commanding victory in a snowboarding half-pipe

competition at the recently-ended Olympic Games in Canada, repeating a gold medal finish he racked up in the games four years earlier.

"As we've just seen at the Olympics, Shaun is a one-of-kind action sports athlete," said Ubisoft senior vice president of sales and marketing Tony Key.

"Shaun's enthusiasm for skateboarding shines through in this truly unique game."

'Battlefield: Bad Company 2' Is A Blast

For the last few years, Activision's "Call of Duty" series has dominated video-game warfare. The latest chapter, "Modern Warfare 2," was the best-selling game of 2009, and it still leads the list of Xbox Live's most-played titles, joined in the top five by two earlier "CoD" releases.

But Activision didn't exactly invent the war game, and almost every major publisher in the industry is competing in the genre. Electronic Arts may be the most aggressive, with three franchises: "Army of Two," "Battlefield" and the rebooted "Medal of Honor" - taking on the champ this year.

"Battlefield: Bad Company 2" (Electronic Arts, for the Xbox 360, PlayStation 3, \$59.99) has a good chance of dethroning "Call of Duty." It looks terrific. Its single-player campaign is more entertaining - and coherent - than that of "Modern Warfare 2." And its developer, Sweden's DICE (Digital Illusions Creative Entertainment), has been refining team-based online combat since its 2002 landmark, "Battlefield 1942."

"BC2" isn't quite a sequel, since it pretty much ignores the events of 2008's "Battlefield: Bad Company." But the characters are the same: Weary veteran Sarge, jittery techie Sweetwater and chatty redneck Haggard round out your squad. Stereotypes all, but their conversations are often quite funny and provide a genuine sense of camaraderie.

Your own character, Marlowe, is the strong, silent type, and since he's such a cipher, he can accommodate any style of play. I like to hang back and snipe enemies from a distance, but you can play Marlowe as a run-and-gun berserker. The artificial intelligence of your squadmates is impressive, and they'll back up whatever strategy you prefer.

The guys are racing against the Russians to find a mysterious weapon of mass destruction. (You know, the Cold War never ended in video-game land.) The pursuit takes place mainly across South America, which offers a variety of beautiful scenery, from snowy mountains and lush jungles to parched deserts and blasted cities.

The eight-hour campaign hurtles along breathlessly, offering a few clever set pieces. One snowbound sequence, in which you're more likely to die from frostbite than bullets, is a nice change of pace, but most missions consist of straightforward kill-or-be-killed action.

"Bad Company 2" lets you wreak havoc with dozens of different weapons, from knives and pistols to machine guns and grenade launchers. You can race through a city on a zippy all-terrain vehicle, or lumber through the countryside in a tank.

All these great toys are also available for online multiplayer action. The game modes are old standbys, like deathmatch and capture-the-flag, but the emphasis is on teamwork. And the fact that just about everything can be destroyed makes each round feel different. Don't get too comfy in that sniper's nest, because a well-aimed grenade could blow it right out from under you.

The latest "Battlefield" refines rather than reinvents its genre. If you're bored with war games, this one won't change your mind. But virtual warriors who are hungry for new worlds to destroy will relish "Bad Company 2." Three stars out of four.

Atari To Transform Online Racing With Test Drive Unlimited 2

Atari, SA, one of the world's most recognized videogame publishers, and much-acclaimed developer Eden Games, are proud to announce the newest installment in the legendary racing franchise with Test Drive Unlimited 2 for the Xbox 360 video game and entertainment system from Microsoft, PlayStation 3 computer entertainment system and Windows PC coming Fall 2010.

Test Drive Unlimited 2 expands on the traditional racing experience providing gamers with M.O.O.R.: Massively Open Online Racing; immersing drivers in a persistent online environment and revolutionizing multiplayer racing communities as players compete, team up, and share their achievements and creations online. Unlike any other driving game, TDU2 blends the open world experience with realistic vehicles and performance dynamics and for the first time, TDU2 features vehicle damage, weather effects, day and night cycles, and a brand new island to explore.

The first Test Drive Unlimited innovated the racing genre with an immersive online and offline experience - over 1 million players created online accounts. Test Drive Unlimited 2 blends the single player and multiplayer experiences seamlessly, creating a dynamic world of unique content and challenges. Test Drive Unlimited 2 is "always live," with automatic updates and seamless online/offline integration. A revamped single player narrative mode can be played offline or as part of the multiplayer experience.

"After the highly successful Test Drive Unlimited which redefined the genre with massively open online racing, Test Drive Unlimited 2 will be an innovative evolution in racing games, expanding its unparalleled multiplayer experience and immersing players in a world full of new online content and lifestyle customization." said Jeff Lapin, CEO of Atari, SA. "The game fits squarely into our strategy of moving online and generating new revenue streams while maintaining our current retail business."

Test Drive Unlimited 2 puts the world's most desirable vehicles in the players hands. These ultra-limited edition masterpieces are flawlessly replicated with Eden's finely tuned driving technology. Players define their online persona through the customization of their vehicles, and the acquisition of property, clothing and all the accoutrements of a luxurious car-based lifestyle. The challenge comes to life with the most expansive and comprehensive multiplayer offering on the console and the ultimate refinement of the core Test Drive driving experience. All-new race types, vehicle classes, environmental challenges, locations and much more push this epic franchise to new levels of performance and luxury.

For more information on Test Drive Unlimited 2 please visit
<http://www.testdriveunlimited2.com> or log on to <http://www.atari.com>.

Bug Plagues PlayStation 3, Sony Warns of Data Loss

Sony Corp. said a glitch has knocked PlayStation 3 users off the game console's online network, and the company warned that data loss could occur if gamers continued using the machines.

Sony said in a blog post Monday that the problem was likely caused by a bug in the clock functionality incorporated in the system, reminiscent of the Y2K bug a decade ago. The problem is affecting older PlayStation 3 models, but not the newest slim version that went on sale in September.

The company urged customers not to use the older PlayStation 3 systems until the problem is resolved, warning that doing so could cause errors and make it impossible to record gaming achievements and restore some data.

Sony would not say how many users were affected by the problem, which comes just as PlayStation 3 sales are picking up. According to the NPD Group, 276,900 units of the system sold in January in the United States, up from 203,200 a year earlier. In December 2009, meanwhile, nearly 1.4 million PlayStation 3 consoles were sold in the U.S.

Errors that PS3 users started seeing Sunday include the date of the systems being reset to Jan. 1, 2000.

The problem was reminiscent of the Y2K bug, in which programming shortcuts caused some computers to malfunction in the new millennium because they interpreted "00" as the year 1900. Although a mass computer meltdown didn't result, as some people had feared, hiccups were reported around the world.

Other problems resulting from the Sony glitch can include an error message saying the user has been logged out of the online game network. Users' game trophies - their accomplishments - can also disappear.

Sony is not the first to deal with a Y2K-like bug years after 2000. At the end of 2008, thousands of Microsoft Corp.'s Zune media players unexpectedly crashed, prompting references to "Y2K for Zunes." Microsoft said at the time that the failures, which affected only the 30-gigabyte Zune models, were caused by a problem with their internal clock.

Sony said Monday that it hopes to resolve the problem within 24 hours.

Game On for PS3 Users after Sony Fixes Bug

Japanese electronics giant Sony assured millions of users that a system bug halting play on older versions of the PlayStation 3 had been fixed.

The company "verified that the symptoms are now resolved and that users are able to use their PS3 normally," Sony spokesman Patrick Seybold said on the PlayStation blog.

Sony earlier indicated that the problem, which has left many PS3 owners unable to connect to the Internet for more than a day and some unable to even play games, was only affecting models released before last year's PS3 "Slim."

"We are aware that the internal clock functionality in the PS3 units other than the slim model recognized the year 2010 as a leap year," said Seybold.

"If the time displayed on the XMB is still incorrect, users are able to adjust time settings manually or via the Internet."

Earlier, the company urged users of the older versions to stop using the videogame console until it fixed the bug.

Using consoles could have resulted in errors with functions like recording obtained trophies or restoring data, according to Seybold, Sony's senior director for corporate communications and social media.

Some PS3 users had complained on the PlayStation blog that "trophies" they earned for progressing through game levels had disappeared.

The players suspected the problem was related to the transition from February 28 to March 1 and deluged the PlayStation blog with hundreds of comments and complaints.

"Please fix it as soon as possible. I can't even play my games offline," said "MohammedMK."

Users were also unable to play back certain rental videos downloaded from the PlayStation Store.

Sony has been pushing the PS3 as more than just a videogaming console, partnering with movie rental website Netflix, for example, to allow users to download movies to television sets or computers.

According to market tracking firm NPD Group, Sony has sold 11.4 million PS3s in the United States, including 276,900 latest-generation consoles in January.

Since its launch with much fanfare in 2006, the PS3 has boasted power and rich graphics, but at premium prices compared to Microsoft's Xbox 360 and Nintendo's innovative Wii consoles.

The PS3's high price tag and a lack of hot new videogame titles translated to sluggish sales that left the consoles in third place behind Xbox 360 and Wii.

Before the latest bug, the consoles were finally gaining momentum thanks to trimmed prices and blockbuster game software.

Sony head Sir Howard Stringer said in January that the PlayStation Network would spread beyond PS3 consoles to a cornucopia of the consumer electronics titan's devices.

"I don't think one glitch in the system is going to topple the entire Network but I think a lot of us are wondering what exactly is going on," said videogame analyst Scott Steinberg, author of "Get Rich Playing Games."

"This helps undermine its credibility at a fairly crucial point in time."

Microsoft survived an Xbox 360 "red ring of death" flaw by fixing the problem and quickly replacing problem consoles. The Xbox Live online play network is now the "gold standard," according to Steinberg.

"Gamers, while fickle creatures, know a thing or two about software glitches," he said.

"At the same time, it remains to be seen whether this is a temporary hiccup or we are really going to be bugging out."

Sony cut prices on existing models to 299 dollars when the slim PS3 went on sale in September.

Soon after Sony slashed the price of its PS3, Microsoft cut the pricetag of its Xbox 360 console, followed by Nintendo, which reduced the price of its Wii for the first time since its 2006 launch.

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A-ONE's Headline News
The Latest in Computer Technology News
Compiled by: Dana P. Jacobson

US Cyber Defense Strategy Details Hit The Internet

The White House has pulled back the curtain on portions of a secret US cyber defense strategy crafted during the administration of former president George W. Bush.

White House Internet security coordinator Howard Schmidt described bits of the strategy at the RSA cybersecurity conference here, saying the revelation was part of a promise of transparency by President Barack Obama.

Parts of a Comprehensive National Cybersecurity Initiative (CNCI) declassified by Obama became available online Tuesday at whitehouse.gov/cybersecurity.

"We can't ask industry to help government and government can't help industry if we don't have transparency," Schmidt said while making the announcement.

"It gives the American people the ability to partner with their government."

Scott Charney, Microsoft corporate vice president of Trustworthy Computing, was among those that welcomed the idea of the government being more forthcoming with cyber defense information.

"The public-private partnership is in need of improvement; it always has

been," said Charney, who was head of computer crime prosecution at the Justice Department from 1991 to 1999.

"It seems the government has moved from a phase of consideration to a phase of action, and that is a good thing."

Sharing cyberattack information between government and private business has been muted by national security concerns on one side and fears of tainting brand images on the other.

"It never really happened," Charney said. "The government didn't share and the industry didn't share."

Schmidt said he hoped releasing declassified versions of the strategy would drive alliances between government cyber warriors and security firms, academics and others skilled in the field.

"Our collective knowledge is our biggest strength," Schmidt said. "We will not beat our adversaries because they are weak; we will beat them because we become stronger."

CNCI was crafted as the result of a presidential directive signed by Bush in January of 2008. Its budget remains a mystery but is estimated to be in the tens of billions of dollars.

The declassified strategy includes consolidating the government computer network and deploying sensors to detect intrusions.

Government agencies must work together on research and link "cyber ops" centers to more astutely assess situations, according to the CNCI.

"There is a pressing need to ensure that government information security offices and strategic operations centers share data regarding malicious activities against federal systems," according to freshly declassified documents.

One of the initiatives calls for a government-wide cyber counterintelligence plan to "detect, deter, and mitigate the foreign-sponsored cyber intelligence threat" to US networks and private businesses.

The government must also figure out its role in the cyber defenses of power grids, financial markets and other computer infrastructure that have become critical to daily life in this country, according to the CNCI.

The US government will need to show it can be trusted to fairly balance cyber defense with respect for privacy of online information.

Some RSA attendees were skeptical, citing Bush-era shenanigans that evidently included snooping on email and other Internet communications without proper court orders.

"You lose trust, it gets harder to do the right thing," Charney said. "If you are Howard Schmidt, the NSA, or whoever, you need to explain what you want to accomplish and how you will execute on it while balancing privacy concerns."

Public-private partnership is imperative to cyber defenses, said Melissa Hathaway, who served as interim cyber chief for Obama before becoming a consultant to computer security firms such as Cisco.

"We are almost at epidemic levels of online fraud and crime; pillaging and looting on the Internet," she said at RSA.

Hathaway proposed the creation of a non-profit organization to act as a neutral party or "safe house" for inside information shared by businesses to alleviate fears of disclosing weaknesses to competitors.

FBI Director Warns of Growing Cyber Threat

Militant groups, foreign states and criminal organizations pose a growing threat to U.S. security as they target government and private computer networks, FBI Director Robert Mueller said on Thursday.

In a speech to an Internet security conference, Mueller said militant groups like al Qaeda had primarily used the Internet to recruit members and plan attacks, but had made clear they also see it as a target.

"Terrorists have shown a clear interest in pursuing hacking skills and they will either train their own recruits or hire outsiders with an eye toward combining physical attacks with cyber attacks," Mueller said.

He noted a cyberattack could have the same impact as a "well-placed bomb."

Mueller added that some foreign governments, which he did not identify, also posed a threat by seeking to use the Internet for espionage.

"Apart from the terrorist threat, nation-states may use the Internet as a means of attack for political ends," he said.

"Nation-state hackers or mercenaries for hire" as well as rogue hackers or international criminal syndicates are targeting government networks, Mueller added.

"They seek our technology, our intelligence, our intellectual property, even our military weapons and strategies."

The comments came in the wake of several international Internet security incidents.

In January, Google Inc, the world's No. 1 Internet search engine, said it had detected a sophisticated online attack on its systems that originated in China and said it believed at least 20 other companies had been targeted.

According to Google, one of the primary goals of the attacks was accessing the personal e-mail accounts of Chinese human rights activists.

Earlier this week, Spanish police arrested three men accused of masterminding one of the largest computer crimes to date, in which more than 13 million PCs were infected with a virus that stole credit card numbers and data.

Mueller said international cooperation was essential to combating online crime like the so-called Mariposa botnet incident in Spain. He added the FBI had 60 "attache" offices around the world as well as special agents embedded with police forces in countries such as Romania, Estonia and the Netherlands.

He urged businesses targeted in cyberattacks to come forward to help track down the perpetrators, saying the FBI was attuned to the delicate nature of the situation for corporations.

"We will minimize the disruption to your business, we will safeguard your privacy and your data and where necessary we will seek protective orders to preserve trade secrets and business confidentiality," he said.

Spain: Mastermind of 'Botnet' Scam A Mystery

Spanish authorities who dismantled a network of up to 12.7 million virus-infected, data-stealing computers said Wednesday the mastermind of the scam remains a mystery, even though three alleged ringleaders have been arrested.

The "botnet" of infected computers included PCs inside more than half of the Fortune 1,000 companies and more than 40 major banks, police said. The tainted computers stole credit card numbers and online banking credentials.

Spanish investigators, working with private computer-security firms, arrested three young Spaniards last month as the alleged ringleaders of the so-called Mariposa botnet, which appeared in December 2008 and grew into one of the biggest weapons of cybercrime.

Spanish authorities are on the trail of a fourth suspect who might be Venezuelan, said Juan Salon of the Spanish Civil Guard's cybercrime unit.

But the people in custody did not design the malicious software behind the grid; rather they just bought it on the black market, Salon told a news conference called to detail the smashing of the network.

"We have not arrested the creator of the botnet. We have arrested the administrators of the botnet, the ones who spread it and were administering and controlling it," Salon said.

He declined to say how much money might have been plundered or name companies whose computers had been compromised.

Botnets are networks of infected PCs that have been hijacked from their owners, often without their knowledge, and put into the control of criminals. Linked together, the machines supply an enormous amount of computing power to spammers, identity thieves and Internet attackers.

There are an estimated 4,000 to 6,000 operating today and this one was the biggest one ever brought down, said Jose Antonio Berrocal, head of the Civil Guard's economic and technological crimes unit.

The Mariposa botnet spread to more than 190 countries, according to researchers. It also appears to be far more sophisticated than the botnet that was used to hack into Google Inc. and other companies in the attack that led Google to threaten to pull out of China.

US Apple iPad Launch Slightly Delayed

The much-anticipated iPad tablet computer from Apple Inc. will start hitting U.S. store shelves on April 3, slightly later than originally planned.

When Apple unveiled the touch-screen device Jan. 27, the company said the first iPads would reach the market in "late March" worldwide, not just in the U.S. Now international releases are planned for later in April.

Investors shrugged off the delay and instead seemed reassured that the tablet wouldn't slip even later. On a day with a broader stock market rally, Apple shares jumped \$7.44, or 3.5 percent, to \$218.15 in midday trading, a record high.

The company did not specify Friday why the tablet is not coming out until April, and Apple spokeswoman Natalie Harrison would not elaborate.

However, Canaccord Adams analyst Peter Misek had said this week that Apple might have to delay or limit the size of the launch because of an "unspecified production problem." Misek said Apple's Taiwan-based supplier, Hon Hai Precision, could be facing a production bottleneck or a shortage of components.

Misek said Friday he couldn't elaborate on the production problem. He said Apple was taking "a very intelligent approach" by allocating more units to the U.S., Apple's biggest market, while delaying overseas availability for the iPad.

The analyst doesn't expect the delay to affect sales of the iPad during Apple's fiscal third quarter, which ends in June. He estimates Apple will sell 550,000 iPads during the period and 1.2 million in fiscal 2010. For fiscal 2011, he expects Apple to sell 3.5 million iPads.

In comparison, Apple sold 8.7 million iPhones in its last quarter alone. The iPad isn't expected to be even close for a while because Apple will have to persuade mainstream consumers to embrace a new category - a device smaller than a laptop but larger than a phone.

Michael Gartenberg, analyst and partner at Altimeter Group, expects the tablet to "resonate well" partly because people already familiar with the iPhone will know what to expect from the iPad.

"Apple has invested not just 10 years of research and development but 10 years of consumer education too," he said. "They've taught consumers about digital music, multi-touch (screens) and video. It would surprise me if it didn't sell 3 to 4 million units (this year)."

The first iPads to go on sale will connect to Wi-Fi networks only and cost \$499, \$599 or \$699, depending on the data storage capacity. Versions that also can connect to "3G" cellular networks are expected to go on sale in late April for \$629, \$729 or \$829. Apple has not yet disclosed international pricing.

U.S. customers will be able to begin placing orders for both models from Apple's Web site beginning on March 12.

All models will be available in Australia, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Spain, Switzerland and the U.K. by late April, Apple said. Other countries are expected to get the device later in the year.

Apple says the iPad will include 12 new applications designed especially for the computer. It will also run "almost all" of the more than 140,000 apps already available for the iPhone and iPod Touch, Apple said. Users will be able to access the applications they bought for those devices through the iPad.

HP Unveils Faster Convertible EliteBook 2740p

Hewlett-Packard unveiled its latest convertible tablet PC on Monday in what some are predicting will be a banner year for that class of devices. Geared toward small to midsize business owners, the EliteBook 2740p, which sells for \$1,599, has multi-touch capabilities, runs Windows 7, and features Intel Core i7 or i5 processors, making it far faster than its predecessors.

The i7 processor runs at 2.66 GHz, while the i5 runs at 2.53 GHz. An alternative i5-520M runs at 2.40 GHz. The installed memory is 2GB or 4GB, but can be upgraded to 8GB.

Hard-drive options range from 80GB to 250GB, and the optional mobile broadband service can be through AT&T, Sprint Nextel or Verizon Wireless.

Convertible tablets have a screen that can swivel to turn it from a laptop into a tablet, so the user can write or compute clipboard-style. The EliteBook also has mouse buttons in addition to a touchscreen that can react simultaneously to both stylus and pen. An optional two-megapixel webcam with business-card reader software is also available. The 2740p can also dock with an optional \$299 expansion base that includes connections to an external monitor and storage drives.

Also expected this year is the much-talked-about Microsoft Courier, a dual-screen, folding tablet PC rumored scheduled for release at midyear.

But the devices shouldn't be confused with the upcoming iPad that Apple announced in January and which will be released around the same time as the EliteBook in April. The iPad may be in a class of its own as a combination e-reader, computer and MP3 device.

"The HP tablet is more of a traditional client computer than the iPad," said E. Scott Menter of Shire Ventures, a California-based technology and business consulting practice and former CIO of WaMu Investments. "Touchscreens are not an advantage in every situation, but where they are -- and where Windows already owns the infrastructure -- it seems like a very good option."

Menter sees the PC industry in a state of flux as manufacturers increasingly seek to integrate enterprise and personal devices that can be used for both business and pleasure.

"My own view of the world is that the generic client computing platform that we're all so used to will eventually give way to more specialized appliances, such as game consoles and highly optimized thin web clients," he said.

"The iPad primarily competes with [Amazon.com's] Kindle [e-reader] in the consumer market," Menter said. "In the business market, it may find a home

for certain specialized apps - for example, as a tool for drivers in the transportation industry to communicate location and delivery information back to headquarters. But why? Corporate America is already engaged with Lenovo, Dell and HP, and those vendors' ultraportables will connect more smoothly into most companies' existing Windows infrastructure."

HP also unveiled a group of notebooks, including the 3.3-lb. HP EliteBook 2540, which starts at \$1,099, and the HP ProBook s-series, available in varying sizes with prices beginning at \$719.

Opera Says Version 10.50 Is the Fastest Windows Browser

Opera Software released a new version of its Internet browser Tuesday that the company claims is the fastest Windows-based platform for surfing the web. Called Opera 10.50, the free browser download now sports a sleek and refined design, together with new social-networking capabilities as well as a private browsing feature that hides all traces of the sites that users visit.

Opera hopes to capitalize on Microsoft's new browser-choice screen for Windows, which gives European Union users the opportunity to switch from Internet Explorer to a rival platform. Implemented as part of Microsoft's recent antitrust settlement with the European Commission, the new browser ballot is expected to be displayed on more than 100 million Windows machines in Europe between now and mid-May.

Opera 10.50 is the fastest browser in almost all speed tests, according to Opera Software CEO Lars Boilesen. "But more important than any speed test is the real-world speed during use," Boilesen said. "We designed Opera 10.50 to be easy to use, while making our unique features stand out so you can get more out of the web."

European users of Windows PCs with IE set as the default browser are being provided with a browser-choice screen designed to ensure competition, said EU Competition Commissioner Joaquin Almunia on Tuesday. The browser-choice screen, which is supposed to randomly rotate the order in which the choices are presented from one machine to the next, includes short descriptions of the major browsers from Apple, Google, Microsoft, Mozilla and Opera.

Microsoft's short ballot description for IE emphasizes the browser's leading marketplace ranking, while Apple stresses Safari's innovation, and Mozilla cites security as Firefox's top priority. By contrast, Google and Opera have elected to promote their speed.

Largely because of its superior speed, Google's Chrome browser has made major market gains. According to Net Applications, Chrome's share of the global browser market rose from 1.79 percent in April to 5.61 percent in February.

With the release of Opera 10.5, Opera Software also hopes to capitalize on user demands for speed through the addition of a new JavaScript engine that it said is up to seven times faster than earlier Opera releases. Moreover, Opera 10.5 incorporates the company's Turbo technology, which is designed to accelerate web access whenever bandwidth availability slows to a crawl.

Opera says its Turbo technology, which compresses web pages on the company's servers, enables users to browse the Internet more than twice as fast as any other browser when connected at speeds of 100 Kbps or less. "Because you transfer less data, web content gets to you faster," the company said.

To maximize speed performance, YouTube videos and other content based on Adobe's Flash technology are only loaded when the user clicks on it. Web-page images also are modified to reduce their size, but users can access any full-quality images by right-clicking.

With Opera's Turbo, encrypted traffic to banks and other secure sites is never routed through the company's compression servers, noted Opera Software spokesperson Falguni Bhuta.

"Opera has always held security and privacy as extremely important," Bhuta said. "All the data in Opera Turbo processes is governed by Norwegian privacy laws, which are quite strict."

Opera also has introduced private browsing in Opera 10.5 for Windows. Private browsing "works both in a separate window" - like other browsers - as well as "in a tab alongside your current browsing sessions, unlike other browsers," Bhuta added.

EU: 100 Million Microsoft Users To Choose Browser

The European Union said Tuesday that some 100 million Europeans using Microsoft Corp. software will be asked to choose among rival Web browsers by mid-May under a deal it struck with the company to settle antitrust action.

Microsoft is starting this month to send updates to Windows computers in Europe so that when computer users log on, they will see a pop-up screen asking them to pick one or more of 12 free Web browsers to download and install, including Microsoft.

The EU's executive commission said giving consumers the chance to try an alternative to Microsoft's Internet Explorer browser that comes with the widely used Windows operating system would "bring more competition and innovation in this important area."

EU antitrust regulators in December dropped their last pending antitrust case against Microsoft after the company offered to let users choose between its browser and others. This ended more than a decade of legal trouble that racked up euro1.7 billion in fines for Microsoft.

Rivals had complained that attaching Internet Explorer to Windows was an unfair way for Microsoft to put its Web software on most of the world's computers.

The top five browsers - Microsoft's Internet Explorer, Mozilla's Firefox, Google Inc.'s Chrome, Apple Inc.'s Safari and Opera, will be given prominent placement on the pop-up choice screen.

The selections will rotate from computer to computer, so none of the these five browsers will always be first.

Far smaller competitors such as Avant Browser, Flock, Green Browser, K-Meleon, Maxthon, Sleipnir and Slim Browser also will be displayed, if the user scrolls sideways.

The EU said greater browser choice also would boost the use of open Web standards - a set of guidelines on how Web sites are designed.

Rivals claim that Microsoft has not always followed these standards closely, forcing Web designers to make sites compatible with Internet Explorer - the leading browser - instead of working smoothly with other Web software.

Microsoft's browser choice screen will be used for five years in the 27-nation European Union plus Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein.

Microsoft could be fined 10 percent of its annual revenue if it doesn't stick to its commitment to distribute the browser screen as agreed and to avoid any retaliation against computer manufacturers who install other browsers as a default on the computers they sell.

Users in the U.S. and elsewhere won't see any change.

EU Urged To Level Playing Field for Web Browsers

Makers of six small Web browsers are urging the European Union to push Microsoft Corp to provide them more visibility in its browser choice website.

Microsoft pledged last December to give European consumers better access to rival Internet browsers in Windows, ending a long antitrust dispute with the European Union.

In March and April, Microsoft is allowing Europeans to select among 12 browsers on almost 200 million old and new personal computers in Europe.

At first sight, Microsoft's browser Choice Screen (<http://www.browserchoice.eu>) shows its own Internet Explorer, Mozilla's Firefox, Apple Inc's Safari and Google Inc's Chrome. It is not immediately obvious that the remaining choices are available by scrolling to the right of the Web page.

Makers of those browsers - Avant Browser, Flock, Green Browser, Maxthon, Slim Browser and Sleipnir - urged the European Commission in a petition on Thursday to rectify the situation.

"We are only requesting the simple addition of any text or design element, that would indicate to an average user that there are choices 'to the right of the visible screen,'" the companies said in the petition.

Microsoft has said the screen was in compliance with the European Commission's decision.

Five largest browsers show directly on the Choice Screen, but smaller vendors say there are no real indication consumers could find more options right to the screen.

"The final Choice Screen design leaves the vast majority of users unaware

that there are more than five browsers to choose from," smaller firms said in the petition.

British Library Creates Archive of Defunct Web

The British Library is creating an archive of the country's defunct Web sites to preserve snapshots of the ever-changing Internet for posterity.

The library is already charged with keeping a copy of every published work distributed in Britain and Ireland. In 2003 that directive was extended to electronic materials such as compact discs and online publications.

Now the British Library said it has begun trawling through the Web and making archival copies of sites of historic interest - including those once maintained by now-bankrupt companies such as Woolworths, Web pages spawned after the July 7, 2005, terrorist attacks in London and Internet coverage of Britain's last general election that year.

Library spokesman Jacob Lant said the project was aimed at filling "a digital black hole in the nation's memory," noting that the library had been unable to turn up any online evidence of such events as the 1997 death of Princess Diana.

"We've already lost a huge amount of data that we'll never see again," he said.

The library said it has so far archived 6,000 sites.

Several projects around the world are also aimed at archiving Web sites, not just dead ones but those that have changed over the years. Among them is the Internet Archive's Wayback Machine at archive.org.

Microsoft Warns of New Bug Affecting IE Users

Steer clear of the F1 key while surfing the Web, at least for a little while.

Microsoft warned Monday of a new vulnerability that affects Internet Explorer users, saying that it could be exploited by hackers to install malicious software on a victim's computer.

The flaw lies in the way Microsoft's VBScript works with Windows Help Files in Internet Explorer. But for an attack to work, the victim must press the computer's F1 key, Microsoft said. "Our analysis shows that if users do not press the F1 key on their keyboard, the vulnerability cannot be exploited."

This type of attack is considered harder to pull off because of this F1 key requirement, but Web-based attacks have emerged as a major source of malicious software over the past few years.

The bug was discovered by security researcher Maurycy Prodeus, who posted details of the attack on Friday.

It affects Windows 2000, Windows XP and Windows Server 2003.

Microsoft has not seen the flaw exploited in any online attacks to date, the company said Monday. Microsoft did not say whether it will fix the bug in its next set of security updates, due March 9, but it usually needs more than a couple of weeks to test and release new security patches.

Japan's Top Forum An Outlet for Free Speech, and Hate

Japan's biggest Internet forum, where anonymous netizens trade anything from cooking tips to death threats, has long been an anarchic zone of uninhibited free speech and a magnet for controversy.

This week the raw commentary on 2channel - which with 10 million visits a month is one of the world's largest online bulletin boards - saw tempers flare anew.

A massive hacker attack from South Korea crippled the site in retaliation for users' online slights against Olympic skater Kim Yu-Na, after she beat Japanese rival Mao Asada to take gold at the Vancouver Winter Games.

The site was attacked on Monday, the anniversary of a 1919 uprising in Korea against Japanese colonial rule, and shut down for two days.

Japanese web users counter-attacked by bombarding South Korean sites, including that of the presidential office, according to South Korea's JoongAng Daily, which called the tit-for-tat flaming "infantile".

The Japanese site, www.2ch.net, does not ask for personal ID details and hosts unfiltered views, in contrast to most chat forums where registration and vetting have become the norm in a bid to keep discussion orderly.

"This is a vast group of bulletin boards on everything from hacking to porn," the site tells users. It boasts about 1,000 topics, from politics to sport to manga comics.

"Sender information cannot be detected, so you can access it from your office, school or prison," users are told. "Please write as you like."

The site was launched in 1999 by a college student, Hiroyuki Nishimura, who has since written several books and is a regular on television shows.

Not counting online role-playing games, it is easily Japan's biggest bulletin board by number of users and page views, according to research firm NetRatings Japan.

The site has given space for discussion on touchy subjects, including Japan's royal family, and gay and lesbian life.

Companies and pollsters review the site to build marketing strategies and study the raw pulse of users and consumers.

At their best, the site's postings have spawned books and movies, including a passionate chronicle by a shy man known as the Train Guy who dated a woman and sought advice from fellow 2channel users.

But no-holds-barred messages also voice sexist, nationalistic and xenophobic sentiments, many targeting Chinese and Koreans.

South Koreans were furious recently when a writer said the mob killing of a Korean college student in February in Irkutsk was "Russia's good deed".

At times, users have threatened crimes on the site.

One of them was Tomohiro Kato, who sent messages from his cellphone shortly before he killed seven people in a stabbing frenzy in Tokyo's neon-lit electronics district in 2008, Japan's bloodiest crime in years.

Nishimura, who gave up control of the site last year but maintains interests in many Internet companies, is unabashed about the darker side of 2channel.

"Ten million people come to the site every month. There is no city in the world with a population of 10 million that has no crime," he said.

Tsutomu Kanayama, professor of journalism and communications at Ritsumeikan University in Kyoto, said 2channel laid bare the pluses and minuses of the social media revolution.

"Mainly because of the anonymity system, it has gone too far and is now full of offensive and meaningless comments," he said.

"But on the other hand, it's a positive trial for a future cyber-forum where anyone can pose real opinions freely. It has both a light and a dark side."

Internet Cafe Ban Call Draws Chinese Hacker Wrath

One woman taking part in China's annual parliamentary meetings has learned that law-making has its drawbacks - especially when you provoke savvy web users.

After Yan Qi, a member of China's legislative advisory body, said she would propose a nationwide ban on private Internet cafes, hackers paralysed the website of her restaurant chain, state media reported Thursday.

Yan, whose business is based in the southwest city of Chongqing, had blamed Internet cafes for social ills ranging from school truancy and petty theft to video game addiction, the Global Times newspaper reported.

"Many serious problems are linked to Internet cafes and businesspeople usually ignore their social responsibilities," Yan was quoted as saying.

"Desperate diseases must have drastic cures, which is to ban them all."

Yan was to propose the ban at the annual gathering of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), which began Wednesday, suggesting that state-run cybercafes should be set up.

Chinese hackers vented their anger by repeatedly hacking into the website of her restaurant chain, Taoranj, changing the home page and

removing links.

An employee told the newspaper the website had "become a target for everyone" and despite repeated attempts to repair it, the attacks were expected to continue until the controversy dies down.

The restaurateur is one of 2,374 hand-picked members of the CPPCC that includes athletes, billionaires, film stars and farmers. Former Olympic champion hurdler Liu Xiang and director Zhang Yimou are among the delegates.

The body has no real legislative power, but in theory advises China's rubber-stamp parliament, the National People's Congress.

China is home to the world's largest web population, with 384 million people online. The country has more than 81,000 Internet cafes with 4.7 million computers.

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